

PYGMY REPORT - FEBRUARY-MARCH 2025

(Way Alege)

Developing resilience in the era of confusion

In our January newsletter, we asked you to pray for the Eastern town of Goma as it was captured on 29th of the same month by the March 23 movement (M23) rebels, backed by Rwandan troops. Since then, events have been unfolding quickly as they (rebels) keep on capturing village after village, and city after city (on left the circled area). After seizing Goma the capital city of North Kivu, they advanced and captured Bukavu, the capital city of South Kivu. Currently, they are reported to be camping 130 kms away from Kisangani, the capital city of Tshopo province. These advancements question the allegations that their aim was to track the former Rwandan rebels that committed genocide in 1994.



As far as Ituri province is concerned (circled above), Ugandan troops had launched joint attack with Democratic Republic of Congo forces in November 2021 against the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a rebel movement that originated from Uganda. These rebels have been killing thousands of civilians for decades in the North Kivu and the Ituri provinces. Before this joint operation brought the ADF exactions to an end, thousands of other heavily armed supplementary soldiers are invited by Kinshasa (DRC) government since 18th February 2025 to Bunia and various villages in the Ituri province to combat ethnic rebel groups. Over two weeks, there has been heavy fighting going on in different areas in the Ituri province. However, X messages (Twitter messages) sent by the chief of Ugandan forces are different.

According to the chief, he has captured Bunia, the capital city of the Ituri province, and his troops are planning to capture Kisangani, the capital city of Tshopo province, where the M23 rebels are advancing. These contradictions brought a lot of confusion, frustration and tension among Congolese soldiers, the population and ethnic groups that are engaged in the war. As a result, banks almost ran out of cash as everyone was trying to have cash in hand. Besides, the cost of living rose as goods cannot easily circulate across the borders and within the province.

When humanitarian assistance collides with development philosophy



Amidst all this confusion, our ministry faces many challenges. First, all Pygmies who are affected by the conflicts have fled into or camp around Komanda. Therefore, they are abruptly forced from hunting-gathering to sedentary life without sufficient means of survival. Second, the philosophy of humanitarian assistance does not match with our vision. Humanitarians believe that displaced people are vulnerable, as their lives are in danger, therefore needs 100% free assistance. However, our philosophy of assistance is based on African and Biblical contexts and principles whereby even a family that is affected by a case of death has to bring in their own contribution, little

as it may be, then to be supplemented by neighbours and relatives. In this case, we believe that the Pygmies under our care, are offered once some assistance (food or medicine) and then can contribute by doing some work. Contrary to this principle, NGO's offer cash which varies from 25 to 70 USD per household (depending on the size) at once. Pygmies live "hand to mouth" way of life and so handling such large amounts of money leads to overspending, alcoholism, violence and theft especially when cash is out of their hands.



As a result, the Pygmies are getting used to easy money, and are now being used by middle men to steal in farms. This practice has brought conflict between progressive farmers and the Pygmies who



in turn are exposed to injuries, imprisonment and death. Unfortunately once the NGO's finish dishing out their cash, it is up to our organisation to manage the side effects such as violence, treating injuries, even burials in case of death.

This is why the months of February and March were the busiest especially for Shalom who had to organise community meetings with the local chiefs, the Pygmies,

farmers and the security officers in order to settle peace among the Pygmies and other communities

The good news is that in our last meeting which was held in Komanda on 12th March 2025, after analysing the situation, participants praised our approach and efforts in taking care of the Pygmies. Everyone came to the conclusion that not only are the Pygmies thieves, but community members, soldiers, some government workers including armed groups who use Pygmies by negotiation or coercion to steal and gain easy money.

Reinforcing our philosophy in Ataloholu



One of the problems that was raised during the meeting is the presence of unknown Pygmies who collaborate with uncontrolled ones in Shaurimoya to perpetuate



evil behaviours. Some middlemen used the Pygmies to destroy the forest reserve at Shaurimoya and harvest from the palm trees or hide there after stealing from others. For this reason, Shalom has decided to work with Sumbu, Nzelewa's son to base his activities in Shaurimoya. (The late Nzeleaa was the one who adopted me in 2006 and gave me his

granddaughter to adopt – the late Fina). Shalom and Sumbu toured the site to see what to do.

At this moment, Shalom is making three trips a week to Shaurimoya so study how work can resume there. One of the major activities will be tree planting to demarcate the property against land grabbers.

Reinforcing our initial philosophy in Ataloholu



Pastor Afise who is a native of Ataloholu and who assisted us in securing land at Shaurimoya and Ataloholu is now back with **Maliamongu**

Our village houses which are wooden almost caught fire in February. Despite the fact that there is no total security measures, the team has decided to take every single opportunity of peace, be it a short moment to make sure that all the surroundings of the

houses are cleared and crops are planted all around.



Meanwhile, we held some discussions with some Pygmy groups of Ataloholu who are in Komanda about the possibility of them going back to farm while children will be studying.

We are encouraging households that are willing to go and live with **Maliamongu** and **Pastor Afise** to do so in order that properties are secured against fire and evil-minded people.



We have noticed that when children have sufficient food, they are willing to live with the teachers and perform some duties. In these photos, children are helping Shalom fix the house he is living in and where the medicines are kept. Because of

heavy rains and wind, walls were pulled down. We are happy that children can invest in quality relationship with the staff.

We praise God for:

- the **security** so far in Komanda and around.
- having protected our houses in Ataloholu.
- preserving Bunia town from bloodshed contrary to what people were fearing in the month of March.
- Promoting to Glory the father of my wife Sylvia, at the age of 90.

Please pray for:

- Safety for **Shalom's** trips to and from Shaurimoya and **Maliamongu** to and from Ataloholu.
- **peace** and **security** in Bunia and entire Ituri province.
- **Housing** for staff and nursery school.
- **Sylvia** for social adjustment of the entire family.